

PERSPECTIVES: A Members' Forum



"Perspectives" serves as a members' forum and features articles on issues of concern to the profession.

Professional Development: It's What You Make It

by Kathie J. Sullivan

It's a common misconception that the AALL Annual Meeting programs are the only continuing education opportunities for law librarians.

There are many educational programs and opportunities offered by AALL and its affiliate partners throughout the year, taught by both AALL members and professional educators and trainers. Some programs don't even require leaving your desk. Such programs are often the major reasons people join associations in the first place. They provide access to experts on a wide variety of topics, professional publications, and a forum to communicate with colleagues. Librarians are no different in this respect than architects, lawyers, accountants, doctors or university professors. Because many of us work alone in our institutions, the need for continuing education — to find out about new subject areas, the latest resources, and innovative solutions to old problems — is even more critical.

It's not an easy task for a national organization to provide quality educational opportunities across the country when

some of its members are not near major metropolitan areas and when budgets are tight and getting tighter. Given these inherent geographical and monetary obstacles, how does AALL honor its mission and offer educational programs to its members? How can program planners deliver programs to the largest number of members? How do planners identify program topics to explore?

Program topics emerge from many sources, including member interests, a difficult reference question, an article someone read, a listserv discussion, a new Web site, newspapers or just about anything else. On the other hand, program planners can select a theme they wish to explore and ask AALL for programs illustrating the theme. Programs can be created for a weekend seminar, a regional mini-conference or the AALL Annual Meeting each July.

The latter method is how the AALL Annual Meeting programs have come about for many years. When developing education programs for the Annual Meeting, the vice president and the Annual Meeting Program Committee establish a theme that is important to them and create programs based on the chosen theme. For the 2002 AALL Annual Meeting in Orlando, the theme is "Creating Connections." Program ideas were submitted based on the AALL "Competencies of Law Librarianship." (For a copy of the AALL "Competencies of Law Librarianship," go to <http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp>.)

The AALL "Competencies for Law Librarianship" has proved to be a good source of ideas for education programs. The competencies describe the expertise and define the value law library professionals provide the legal field. "These competencies may be acquired through higher education, such as library and information science programs; through continuing education; and through experience," according to the Professional Development Committee and the AALL Executive Board.

The first section of the competencies outlines the "basic competencies" all law librarians should have and have probably achieved early in their careers. The document later details more specialized competencies that law librarians will likely achieve over the length of their careers. In fact, the "Competencies for Law

Librarianship" states that "individual librarians may use the AALL competencies for coordinating their continuing education as they identify areas for professional growth."

Many of AALL's Professional Development programs this year were adapted to address the competencies. So program planners for Special Interest Sections, chapters or any other group would not lack for topics to explore if they used the competencies to generate program ideas.

Librarians do not benefit from having national credentials, but employers may be impressed if law librarians present them with a copy of the competencies along with a request to attend a continuing-education program. AALL wants employers to use the competencies to make hiring, evaluation and promotion decisions. These competencies could pave the way for a law librarian certification program in the future. Remember that the competencies are neither exhaustive nor should they be the only source of program ideas, but they could serve as a basis for a systematic approach to program development for several years.

Even with innovative sources of program ideas, smaller member groups, such as SISs and regional chapters, often have trouble recruiting members to develop programs. As in any professional organization, the actual needs of members are often quite diverse and changing. The factors that such professional groups have to face include size of membership, burnout, geography, budgets and any number of other issues that may change over time.

To keep up with members' interests, AALL conducts needs surveys regularly. As a result, AALL offers assorted programs in multiple locations and meets member needs year after year.

AALL's successful programs are also due to its excellent professional staff and volunteer planners who maintain strategic partnerships with other professional organizations. Partnering with other groups or importing relevant programs are two ways to accomplish the difficult task of diversifying educational programs.

If you have been intimately involved with the program-planning process, you know how stressful it can be to design a

program from start to finish — securing speakers, publicizing the event and wondering if anyone will attend. Partnering with other library groups or chapters is an excellent way to provide high-quality, diverse programming at a manageable cost and pique the interest of attendees. There is nothing worse than having someone look at a program announcement and comment, “Didn’t we do this before?” Partnerships should not be limited to law librarian groups. Medical and science

AALL Handles All Details of PDC Programs

A chapter that wants to set up a Professional Development Committee program incurs NO costs and exacts minimal effort — just leave it up to AALL.

AALL coordinates the program and pays all fees. As it determines the budget for the program, AALL will establish the registration fees and register participants. The Association will also obtain the program’s speakers and pay their honoraria, meals, airfares and hotel expenses. AALL prints and ships the program handouts and the promotional brochures. It will also promote the programs on AALLNET and listservs.

To help publicize the program, AALL will seek the chapter’s help as well. Using the chapter’s mailing list, AALL will send the chapter’s members brochures of the upcoming event. The Association will also recommend that the chapter promote the program on listservs and its own chapter Web site. The chapter should also notify AALL about any other local organizations that might have members interested in attending the program, so AALL can market the program with those other organizations, too.

If the chapter helps with the program’s promotion, AALL donates one FREE registration up front — the chapter can use it as a scholarship, raffle prize, etc. Then at the program, AALL puts the names of all chapter members into a bag and draws one name. That person then gets his or her registration fee refunded. Only chapter members are included in the drawing.

For further details on partnering with AALL for a Professional Development Committee program, please contact AALL Education Manager Mary Jawgiel at 312/939-4764, extension 24, or mjawgiel@aall.org.

librarians, accounting and other special librarians, as well as public and academic librarians, have much to offer us. We are not just law librarians anymore, we are “managers of global information resources” — paying attention to the programs offered by these other groups would only enhance our skills as information specialists.

Partnering can be accomplished within AALL as well. For instance, in 1996 an Ad Hoc Chapter Relations Advisory Group was established to “learn about AALL chapters and find ways our national and local/regional organizations could work more effectively together.” Using input from many chapter leaders, the group identified a number of areas where AALL and chapters could cooperate and share expertise and resources to benefit members. The resulting vision statement declares, “AALL and the chapters are united in a mutually supportive alliance to enhance the profession of law librarianship.”

The AALL Professional Development Committee has been stridently identifying outstanding chapter programs in order to bring them to the attention of all members. The PDC wants other groups to adapt those chapter programs to their own regions. At the 2002 AALL Annual Meeting in Orlando, Fla., the PDC will hand out the first Chapter Professional Development Awards. One award will be given to a chapter for creating and implementing a comprehensive, quality program of up to one year in length. The other award will recognize a single quality program of one-half day or longer.

Alternatively, the AALL Professional Development Committee has a roster of programs that chapters can import. (For a full list of available programs and descriptions, go to <http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/availability.asp>.) The PDC has used the “Competencies of Law Librarianship” to develop programs on copyright, law for the non-J.D., basic cataloging, and managing various types of libraries and departments. The programs are prepared with speakers and materials and are ready to be implemented once AALL Headquarters has been contacted. AALL manages the scheduling, coordination, registration and will even order the food. (See the sidebar for details.)

Just as partnerships take different forms, so does the actual format or delivery of a professional development program. In addition to the usual offerings of annual meetings and spring institutes at the local level and Annual Meeting programs and

workshops at the national level through AALL, the PDC also offers listserv discussions and the Desktop Learning Series that appears in *AALL Spectrum*. This year listserv discussions covered such topics as “Library Systems: What Criteria to Use When Migrating,” “Research in Mexican Law” and “Digital Information and the Future of Digital Libraries.” Recent Desktop Learning articles in *AALL Spectrum* included “Collection Development and Weeding à la Versace: Fashioning a Policy for Your Library,” “Just What the Webmaster Ordered: Tips for Marketing a Law Library Web Site”; and “Essential Elements for Starting a Library Preservation Program.” These professional development opportunities require only your time!

One of the most unique professional development offerings this spring was the “Online Licensing” tutorial that AALL co-sponsored with the American Library Association’s Office for Information Technology Policy. Nearly 650 members participated in this FREE e-mail program prepared by Lesley Ellen Harris, copyright attorney, consultant and author. Running from February through April, the tutorial provided more than 25 brief but informative messages to help librarians negotiate and interpret licensing agreements with confidence.

Professional Development and Annual Meeting programming are highly visible and primary sources for obtaining continuing education, but do not forget the value of professional publications, such as the AALL Resource Guides and *Law Library Journal*. Often colleagues post messages to various listservs asking for information on such topics as writing a job description, space planning, negotiating contracts, records management and more. We are all very busy, and professional reading piles up on desks, but these publications are excellent resources for practical information. Many times the articles have been written by colleagues who once had the very same questions. Why not take advantage of their trailblazing?

As you plan future SIS, chapter, and regional programs, institutes and annual meetings, take a minute to survey the various options for obtaining a meaningful professional development experience. Be creative. Talk with your colleagues. Read the professional literature. And be a part of your own professional development.

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